



Public Affairs Section United States Embassy Nairobi

U.S. Librarianship in the Present Day – Trends, Challenges and Partnerships

Kenya Polytechnic University College
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250 librarian & information students gathered at Kenya Polytechnic University College yesterday for a panel discussion with librarians from the U.S. Embassy and other organizations in Kenya. The panel was led by Sheila Weir, Regional Information Officer, U.S. Embassy, Nairobi. Other panelists were Pamela Howard-Reguindin, Field Director for the Nairobi office of Library of Congress; Leah Hannaford, an information specialist for the US Army and a distance learning Library and Information Studies student; George Kamau, Director of the American Reference Center in the US Embassy; Ariel Schwartz, co-founder and co-director of Maria's Libraries; and Sarah Kibugi, Dean School of Liberal and Technology Studies at Kenya Polytechnic. The discussion was opened by Prof. Dr. –Ing Francis W.O. Aduol, Principal of Kenya Polytechnic. Each of the panelists introduced themselves to the audience and gave a brief overview about what they do as librarians.

The audience asked questions of the panelists about opportunities for studying in the States, and the future of librarians and the role they play. One member of the audience commented on Ariel Schwartz's organization, he thought that the work she was doing through Maria's Libraries was a key issue to address in Kenya. Maria's Libraries is a US based non-profit organization that works towards growing and supporting the public library network in Kenya. Pamela Howard-Reguindin spoke about the collection and digitization process of the Library of Congress (LOC), the largest library in the world.

As the age of technology rises, and the internet seems to command most of the research this generation does, many wondered if librarians were becoming less and less purposeful. The experienced librarians on the panel urged the audience that this was not the case at all, but rather librarians were learning to adapt to the advancements that the internet and technology have made. Today many librarians are educated in information research on the internet, and are guiding people towards the information they seek by picking the right search engine, refining their search, using keywords, and finding different databases online that would be helpful to their research. Panelist Sarah Kibugi challenged the audience to rise to the occasion and adapt to the needs of the future generations instead of letting professional librarians become obsolete.

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